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Atari Online News, Etc.
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A-ONE #0203

01/21/00

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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

It's beginning to look a lot like.... Sure, now we get the snow! This past week has been absolutely horrendous! We're having the second of two storms within the week. In and of themselves, no big deal - I grew up in Maine where snow 2-3 times a week during the winter was the norm. And we got SNOW, not the occasional few 4-6 inches here. But, we've also lost our heat twice this week with no determined cause. Other than the bitter cold, we don't know why that happened. Work has been just a bundle of joy, as well. Yes, I'm being sarcastic!! The hospital's budget concerns has everyone on edge! Never a dull moment...

So, what do you think of the news of Bill Gates stepping down? How about the Time-Warner buyout by AOL? My head's still spinning over these two stories! And Microsoft is still wailing that it's a victim! And dinosaur bones are being auctioned off on the internet!! What a world we live in!

I don't remember if I mentioned it or not, but I recently picked up a secondhand digital camera for my PC. I actually bought it from my brother for an excellent price. Sometimes that bothers me because you can never tell just what kind of a "deal" my brother offers! But anyway, I've been playing around with it and it's a lot of fun. The pictures have been wonderful; I've been using my two dogs as subjects. The things that can be done with this camera are amazing. And to top it off, the software that accompanies it allows even more options. I've only begun to work with it, but I have got quite a few terrific pictures which I've saved and printed out. The detail and color clarity have been wonderful. If you can find an affordable digital camera, get one.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, we're getting our second snow of the season here in Connecticut right now. I know that it might not be a big deal to someone who lives in, say, Colorado, but here in the northeast it's only been in the past two weeks or so that we've gotten weather cold enough to make it truly feel like winter.

Most of the people I know spent the first part of the winter complaining that there was no snow or that it was just too warm to be winter, and the rest of it complaining that there IS snow and that it IS cold.

It's just human nature, I guess. You always have what you don't want and want what you don't have. I used to be that way about computers. When I had a T/S ZX81 I wanted a Spectrum. When I had a Spectrum I wanted a

VIC-20. When I had a VIC-20 I wanted a C64....

And when I had a C64 I wanted to give up computers all together. <grin>

Of course, it wasn't until I got my first ST that I really figured out exactly what it was that I wanted out of a computer. Good graphics, ease of use, and a genuine community of like-minded people who have, to this day, been a constant source of help and support.

Sure, we all knew that there would be other computers some day. But be honest... has any computer before or since been as special as that first ST? My first ST, a 1040 STFM, still sits in a closet, buried under various miscellaneous items. To be honest, it's much less of a computer than my TT, and even my Mega STE. But I just can't bring myself to part with it. There's a large part of myself in there along with the assorted chips and resistors and such. I spent so many hours pouring over online posts and program listings and graphics and in chats that it feels as if part of me oozed from my fingers into the keyboard and right down to the circuit board. Now how could I ever part with that?

Now there are probably one or two of you out there who are reading this and thinking, "C'mon fella, it was just a computer. And not a very advanced one at that". But how advanced it was doesn't matter. It was the first computer that I felt comfortable with. And that is what makes it special.

Now let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet...

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

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Joseph Zorzin asks:

"Where can I find a ROM dumper utility for an Atari 1040ST?

I have downloaded Gemulator and I also downloaded 2 versions of the Atari ROM- 1.4 and 2.6 from <http://www.lgd.fatal-design.com/>. All of which work fine with some Atari programs but I'm having no luck with Megamax Laser C which crashes my Pentium.

So, the author of Gemulator suggested getting a dumper utility to download the ROM from my own 1040ST which still works."

David Jackson tells Joe:

"I can understand why Laser C crashes your emulator. Compilers are usually very designed very specifically for the architecture. Is there some reason why you would want to run your Laser C programs under the emulator?"

Joe replies:

"My Atari is getting long in the tooth. I suspect it may die any day. Also, I did a lot with Laser C before my Atari hard drive crashed and rather than buy another Atari hard drive - it seems sensible to do it all on a PC in emulator mode - until I can learn MS Visual C++, then convert the programs written on the Atari for my consulting business. The author of Gemulator swears it works..."

Kenneth Medin adds:

"Check your ST's TOS version. If it says 1985 it's 1.0, 1987 is 1.2 and 1989 is 1.4 and download the same version. Really no need for a dumper utility as most TOS versions are available.

Start the emulator in "Atari disk mode" and set it up to boot from floppy and in monochrome. Now put in your normal boot floppy from the real ST. Keep any original floppies write-protected as Win-95/98 also writes to the floppy when reading (SIC!).

If this does not work then you are probably out of luck. G emulator 2000 is generally very good but you may also try a more "games oriented" emulator. Sorry, I don't remember any names."

John Kormylo asks a question about STinG:

"I had Hsmodem, Sting, Dialer, CAB & Newsie all working with my old PPP ISL (text logon), but when I tried to use a new PPP ISL with PAP, I get a 2 bomb crash (A2 contains a NULL) during the link initialization stage of dialer.

Has anyone else had this problem? Has anyone found a solution?

The readme says that he never actually tested the PAP feature. Is there a newer version where someone HAS tested the PAP?"

Frank Lawrence tells John:

"I am using all of STING's latest uploads along with HSMODEM7 on my TT and am using a PAP with no problems at all. Could this be a problem with the buffer settings in HSMODEM7?"

John Garone adds:

"Aha! Come to think of it, If I tried to set the buffers to max (65534 I believe) It gummed up the works. Instead (for laziness) I use the "u" (auto) setting in all the buffers (sets for 256). This ungummed the works! Hope this helps!"

For the adventurous among us, Don Shoengarth tells us that he's...

"Looking for some input on which AES replacement is the best to use on a TT030 w/4ST & 4TT ram."

Martin-Eric Racine tells Don:

"AES 4.1 (a.k.a. MultiTOS) might be enough. It does colour icons and 3-D effect, plus multi-tasking. However, the desktop wasn't made with long filenames in mind, which might be a problem. I believe it has been distributed along with KEMD, for a while.

Otherwise, there is the commercial N.AES, which several of us prefer, because it has several novelties that MultiTOS never got around to and is generally more stable. However, it doesn't come with its own desktop. Thing is a favorite desktop for many people. The main other option is Jinee.

Both of the above run on top of MiNT. Note that you don't need a full Minix partition for this. Just put MINT.PRG in your auto folder and configure a few things in the MINT.CNF setup file (which goes to

C:\mint\mint.prg usually). That's it.

Otherwise, you could also run Magic, but Bengy is probably better at claiming the merits of this one than me."

Dennis Vermeire adds:

"So far, several people here have advised you to take the MiNT route, and without even asking what exactly you want to run or use it for. What they forgot to mention is that MiNT in combination with N.AES is quiet memory hungry.

When choosing a OS, one should make a wishlist.... there is no such thing as the perfect OS, they all have their plus and cons.

Magic is commercial, easy to setup and maintain. Most of the commercial software is programmed to use the features of Magic to reach their full potential. Since most of the commercial software is released by ASH, one can be assured this will remain so for future releases. N.AES has been playing catch up lately and the last version is "Magic compatible" now. But to put it in the words of Coca Cola "nothing beats the real thing". Magic is available in English with a English manual, every Atari dealer will be able to order it for you. AFAIK the complete N.AES package is only available in German with German documentation. And it's not really easy to get hold of either.

In general Magic runs smoother and has a better graphic appearance. To install the package you only need two mouseclicks and reboot the TT.

You should really give us a bit more feedback, when choosing the ideal OS it's important to know what you intend to do with it, what kind of programs you are using or thinking of using. Are you going to network the TT with other computers or use it as a stand alone computer? How much are you prepared to spend. Most importantly what do you expect of the OS? "

Rene de Bie asks for help with his new TT:

"I am a NOT experienced user on these machines and want to know how the partitioning and system files are called and used.

My harddisk in TT won't boot and I found out that a harddisk driver on a floppy AHDI606.PRG when I run it, I have to select install devices to get my harddisk. But how can I make my harddisk bootable?

Secondly, which driver is recommended and why?"

John Logan tells Rene:

"There ought to be a facility on the HD program which says 'Install Hard Disc Driver' (or words to that effect). Click on that and then select the drive to install it on - normally for a hard drive that is Drive C."

Ken Macdonald adds:

"You simply run ahdi606.prg and it boots the hard drive. correct.

>I have to select install devices to get my harddisk.

once you install the new devices on the desktop, select "save the desktop"

from the menu bar. this will save 'desktop'info into a file called newdesk.inf

To make the hard disk bootable, start up hdx.prg

on menu bar click on install.

choose the partition to install on (usually c:\)

reboot.

hard drive should now boot, and any programs(*.prg) in \auto folder will run, and any *.acc/essories in root directory (c:\)will load

Although you can configure AHDI using AHDICONF.prg,
and although CBHD is freeware,

I use and recommend HD Driver by Uwe Seimet

http://home.nikocity.de/nogfradelt/atari_english.html"

Michael Freeman asks about a problem running STinG with Magic:

"I just got Magic 6, and I've run into a little problem with Sting. With the exact same Sting setup I use in Geneva, only with Magic running instead, I get a "Passing connection to Sting failed!" dialog after the dialer connects. Now I know that Sting does work with Magic, as I've seen a number of people talking about it, so what the heck am I doing wrong?!?!?! The documentation with Magic is pretty thin and doesn't cover much except the extreme basics, and the Sting documentation I have is even worse!..."

...
I discovered that Fast Serial didn't like Magic. I was using Fast Serial because HS Modem didn't want to work very well for me with Geneva. I tried it with Magic, and everything's ok now.

One new problem: CAB 2.7 demo will only show partial pages (usually the last few lines) of downloaded html. For instance, I went to www.atari.org, and the top of the page started with a screwed-up version of the "Star Trek Women" vote, with the Pacman animated GIF, and a few other things, but the majority of the page was missing. This happened with most pages I tried to download, but not with the ones I have offline. It does seem to download the entire page, and it sits at "Prepare Formatting..." for quite a while before showing the partial page. I'll try messing with settings and changing CAB.OVL's to see what I come up with."

Joe Villarreal adds a word of encouragement:

"I installed Magic6/jinnee (12/27/99) and had no problems using Sting. I had been using Geneva/Neodesk before.

It must not be a major problem. I would check the order in the auto folder, the Sting.INF file, the .STX files, and the CPX's."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Lynx 'Othello'! 'Worms' For GBC!
" " " Tomb Raider Coming To Dreamcast!
" " " 'Tomba! 2'

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Infogrames North America, Inc. Attacks Game Boy Color
With Worms: Armageddon

Slimy Critters Hit Stores This Week

The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out ... of Game Boy Color with Infogrames North America Inc.'s latest release, Worms: Armageddon, hitting store shelves this week.

The game packs the strategy and action of a sophisticated war scenario into a fun-filled, hilarious and sometimes misguided battalion of angst-ridden worms.

As in previous versions of the Worms family, Worms: Armageddon is a turn-based strategy game, where teams battle across bizarre, randomly generated landscapes or finely crafted custom designed levels. Players have a set time in which to make a move with their army of worms before the game automatically switches to the next team, giving the players time to conjure up their next maneuver by choosing from a nearly endless arsenal of madcap weapons. In addition, no game of Worms: Armageddon is ever the same, making game-play virtually endless.

"Worms: Armageddon combines strategy and comedy in a way that makes it one of the most entertaining games on the market," said David Riley, director of marketing for Infogrames North America, Inc.'s Action and Strategy Label. "Bringing this title to Game Boy Color will allow Worms fans to take the action on the go as well as introduce it to a whole new gamer audience. It's addictive, hysterical, straight-to-the-point fun."

Worms: Armageddon features such options as one or two player action. Players either compete against a computer opponent, or take turns blasting a friend. Other options include using the wind as a tool in shooting accuracy, selecting the energy level for each worm, determining the amount of worms on a team, and choosing from a variety of different weapons. Players can choose from such creatively destructive weapons as bazookas, which wreak havoc on worms and the surrounding landscapes, to exploding sheep, top-secret furry friends that relentlessly run toward the enemy worm and detonate on command.

Developed by Infogrames' Paris Studios, Worms: Armageddon is available at

an estimated retail price of \$29.99 and can be found at most major retail outlets.

Sega and Eidos Interactive Partner to Bring 'Tomb Raider: the Last Revelation' to Sega Dreamcast

For the last three years, the "Tomb Raider" series has only been available on the PlayStation game console and PC. Now, Sega of America makes history - again. Sega announced Thursday that Eidos Interactive will ship "Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation" for Sega Dreamcast, the 128-bit, Internet-ready videogame console, this spring. Developed by Core Design, "Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation" is just one of many titles that Eidos has committed to bringing to the platform this year. The "Tomb Raider" series has already enjoyed tremendous success, selling more than 18 million copies worldwide and Sega expects that this well-known franchise will further fuel the retail demand and consumer enthusiasm for the Sega Dreamcast hardware.

Taking advantage of the unsurpassed power of Sega Dreamcast, Eidos has greatly enhanced the graphics of this title. In this version, Lara Croft has been remodeled so that she is displayed in high resolution to match the game's lavish environments, thus creating unprecedented realism in the game. "Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation" for Sega Dreamcast will also feature an enhanced lighting system, a greater draw distance than seen on other versions, real-time shadow casting, bump mapping, environment mapping, volumetric fogging and an enhanced sound system.

"We are honored that Eidos is bringing a well-known property such as 'Tomb Raider' to Sega Dreamcast," said Neal Robison, group director of third party licensing for Sega of America. "This further solidifies the commitment and enthusiasm of the third party community for the platform and signals how well it is selling in the marketplace. We will continue to focus on third party support for Sega Dreamcast to bring the best library possible to our consumers."

"Eidos has been a supporter of Sega Dreamcast since the launch of the console. Alongside publishing original Sega Dreamcast titles, we have a strategy of developing versions of our most successful franchises for the platform," said Mike McGarvey, chief operating officer of Eidos. "'Tomb Raider' is one of the most successful brands in our industry's history and the power of the Sega Dreamcast console greatly enriches the whole Lara Croft experience for game fans the world over."

Tomba! 2 the Evil Swine Return for PlayStation Kicks Off New Year With Full 3D Graphics and Daring New Adventure

Sony Computer Entertainment America announced Tuesday the nationwide release of TOMBA! 2 The Evil Swine Return, now available exclusively for the PlayStation game console. Combining improved 3D graphics with the classic style gameplay of a platform game intertwined with role-playing game (RPG) elements,

TOMBA! 2 The Evil Swine Return follows everyone's favorite pink-haired hero

on an all new fantastical adventure. Featuring a smoother learning curve, novice players can select a less complicated, whimsical journey, while experienced players can choose a more elaborate path full of challenging sub-quests and obstacles.

"TOMBA! 2 The Evil Swine Return builds upon the originality and humor of the original TOMBA!, now delivering an imaginative 3D experience," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. "We are confident that this game will appeal to both young and more advanced gamers, making it one of the 'must-have' family-friendly titles for PlayStation."

In TOMBA! 2 The Evil Swine Return players follow Tomba as he embarks on a wild new adventure to save his girlfriend from the band of evil pigs who have kidnapped her. Throughout the game, Tomba must perform basic moves, acquire special actions and discover new items and weapons to assist him in warding off the enemies.

To perform special actions, Tomba must equip himself with magical clothes that allow him new moves and powers, including:

Bird Clothes -- needed to glide through the air for a limited amount of time
Flying Squirrel Suit -- needed to float in the air for a longer period of time
Pig Suit -- needed to perform hip attack move
Evil Pig Robes -- needed to obtain magic powers to defeat the next pig boss

With more than 150 new items and weapons to discover, Tomba can obtain a black jack, boomerang, grapple, heavy duty hammer and more. Players find themselves continuously searching for more items and weapons, unveiling hidden paths, battling humorous yet challenging enemies and encountering numerous tasks along Tomba's visionary quest.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!

Othello Is Coming For The Lynx!

Long-time Lynx hobbyist Harry Dodgson is releasing Othello for the Atari Lynx in February 2000 through Video 61. This excellent port of the classic board game includes multiple play modes (single player, head-to-head, and more), attractive graphics, and crisp audio.

You may contact Video 61 by visiting their web page, located at:

<http://www.atarisales.com>

Ask about Othello for the Lynx, and tell them you heard about it from Songbird Productions!

Carl Forhan
Songbird Productions

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Chances of Microsoft Settlement Become More Remote

Chances of a settlement in the Microsoft Corp. antitrust case were never very good, but after a week of raucous public debate over breaking up the company the possibility of a deal seemed more remote than ever.

Both sides had promised Judge Richard Posner -- the chief of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit acting as a private mediator in the case -- to stay quiet during the talks. Talks began after U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson found in early November, 1999, that Microsoft had used monopoly power to harm consumers, competitors and other companies.

The quiet lasted from late last year until last week, when USA Today reported the government was going to propose breaking the company into two parts.

Representatives of the Justice Department and the states expressed anger and frustration -- both privately and in public statements -- about what they said was an incorrect characterization of the discussions.

Even worse from their point of view was the fact that they had been described at all. The Justice Department and the states both released statements saying the USA Today story contained significant errors.

The story inevitably sparked many others, including one by Reuters, which reported that the government planned to seek a break-up of Microsoft in some form.

All of the stories appeared to be incomplete and missed important aspects of the evolving government plan, which remains secret, persons familiar with the case say. But government officials say they can't discuss the case at all without running the risk of violating a pledge of secrecy.

"Because of the current posture of the case it would be inappropriate for us to debate the merits of any particular remedy," said Gina Talamona, a Justice Department spokesman.

That put Microsoft in a quandary. It, too, had promised the judge not to discuss the subject of remedies. But it faced a changed landscape, analysts say.

"All of a sudden we were no longer debating whether structural remedies

are appropriate," said Ed Black, chairman of the Computer and Communications Industry Association.

"Instead, it's what kind of structural remedies," he said. "And I think Microsoft got very worried, very concerned, that momentum was building that structural remedies were inevitable."

On the morning the stories appeared, Microsoft announced a hastily organized press conference for 1:30 p.m. that day, without mentioning the subject.

As it turned out, the subject was Bill Gates' decision to give up his post of chief executive officer to his old Harvard chum, Microsoft President Steve Ballmer. Gates, who will remain as chairman, said he would focus on software.

Ballmer's most highly quoted statement had nothing to do with his new job, though. Ballmer said it "would be absolutely reckless and irresponsible for anyone to try and break up this company."

Black speculated the press conference was deliberately timed to change the direction of public discussion about a break-up. He said Microsoft was taking a "chicken little" approach, saying "the sky is falling and the industry and economy will go to hell if you touch Microsoft."

But by Microsoft's lights it was faced with a deliberate press campaign by the opposition.

In a teleconference, Ballmer said he believed the talk of a break-up was purposely leaked by Justice Department officials in hopes of pressuring Microsoft to settle quickly.

"I believe the leaks are deliberate. I don't think there's any doubt about that," Ballmer said.

Against that background, the company will file its next papers in the case on Tuesday. If no settlement is reached, the case will continue as scheduled. Judge Jackson is set to hear oral arguments Feb. 22.

Microsoft Says It Broke No Laws, Not a Monopoly

Microsoft Corp. argued in its antitrust case on Tuesday that its actions were lawful and that it lacked monopoly power due to numerous competitive threats.

In the court filing, the software giant disagreed with many of the findings of fact reached by U.S. District Court Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson last year which concluded Microsoft's dominance in personal computer operating systems had harmed consumers, competitors and computer makers.

"Even accepting the court's findings of fact, plaintiffs still have not satisfied their burden under the governing law on any of their claims," Microsoft argued in its reply to the government's brief, filed in December.

Microsoft disagreed with the view that it held monopoly power in the

market for Intel-powered personal computers. Microsoft said that narrow definition excluded "many of the most serious competitive threats faced by Microsoft's operating systems".

The company also argued that earlier court rulings made it clear that it had the right to design its Windows operating system to include the Internet Explorer Web browser, and that it never foreclosed the field to competitors.

The government side, consisting of the U.S. Justice Department and 19 states, and Microsoft will file one more reply each before the judge hears oral arguments on conclusions of law on Feb. 22.

Shortly before Tuesday's court filing, Microsoft reported stronger than expected earnings for its second quarter ending in December, helped by strong demand for personal computers.

Profit rose to 44 cents a share from 36 cents in the same quarter a year earlier, marking a continuation of a strong year in which Microsoft has exceeded analysts forecasts.

"Software is the key to the future. It will drive and accelerate innovations in hardware, wireless, broadband, e-commerce and other fields," said Steve Ballmer, president and chief executive officer-designate at Microsoft.

Both sides in the antitrust case have been meeting regularly with a Chicago judge appointed by Jackson as a mediator but there are few signs of a settlement emerging.

Reports last week that the government was seeking to break up the world's largest software company, were criticized as incomplete by people familiar with the case.

Nevertheless, the stories by news organizations, including Reuters, were the type of public discussion that Judge Richard Posner -- chief of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit acting as a private mediator -- had hoped to avoid.

Microsoft said talk of a break-up was reckless and accused Justice Department officials of deliberately leaking information.

The Justice Department denied it discussed the mediation talks and noted the stories contained significant errors. "The Justice Department will not discuss any aspect of the mediation process," a department official said.

Merger May Preempt Web Regulation

The proposed merger of America Online and Time Warner could help keep the government from having to regulate high-speed Internet service, the nation's top telecommunications official says.

But the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Bill Kennard, said his agency will review the merger carefully to ensure that "first and foremost the public interest is served."

"Obviously this transaction will raise some interesting new issues that we haven't confronted before because it's a different kind of merger than we've looked at," he said.

So far, the FCC has declined to force cable companies providing high-speed Internet access to share their lines with rivals, staking out a hands-off position in the contentious debate.

Until its merger announcement, AOL was leading a charge to persuade regulators or courts to force cable TV operators - notably AT&T Corp. - to lease their high-speed connections to Internet service providers, such as AOL.

But with its Time Warner acquisition, AOL would have its own large network of cable TV lines over which to deliver Internet services dozens of times faster than today's dial-up connections.

That meshes with the commission's policy of letting companies resolve their concerns about Internet access without regulators getting involved.

"Some of the statements we've seen around this AOL-Time Warner transaction are encouraging," Kennard said.

It still is unclear whether the Justice Department or the Federal Trade Commission will handle the antitrust review of the merger case. A number of lawmakers have indicated their interest in holding hearings on the deal, including Senate Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain, R-Ariz.

McCain, who is seeking the GOP presidential nomination, said this weekend he thinks the deal "needs careful scrutiny" and expressed fears about the ultimate impact of the wave of recent mergers in the communications industry.

"Obviously, you reach a point at some time where it's not good for the consumer and it stifles competition," McCain said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

The FCC examines media mergers to see whether they are in the public interest - an examination that is separate from the review conducted by antitrust regulators.

Kennard said he hoped to have a number of the mergers currently before the commission wrapped up in the first half of the year. U S West/Qwest, CBS/Viacom, AT&T/MediaOne, Bell AtlanticGTE and MCI WorldCom/Sprint all have transactions before the agency.

"These mergers clearly touch every American in some way and we've got to make sure that we are advocating their interests when these mergers come before us," Kennard said.

@Home-Usenet Scuffle Could Be Settled

A compromise may be reached between broadband Internet service provider Excite@Home and members of the Usenet community who want to prevent @Home's servers from posting messages to the newsgroup service.

David Ritz, the Usenet volunteer who earlier this week called for a

Universal Death Penalty (UDP) against the service scheduled to go into effect on January 19th at 5:00 p.m., now says he will recommend extending the deadline for @Home's compliance.

UDP's are used against ISP's that consistently post high volumes of spam -- unwanted junk e-mail -- to Usenet newsgroups. It is the harshest punishment the community-run service can threaten. When a UDP is enacted, the volunteers who monitor newsgroups for spam prevent messages originating from the offending ISP's servers from being posted to the newsgroups. Because Usenet has no central governing authority, the punishment is enforced voluntarily by the Usenet community.

According to Ritz, 25 to 40 percent of the articles posted from @Home's service are spam. Of that, Ritz says 90 percent comes from unknown outside sources that are exploiting "back doors" in @Home's service to deliver the unwanted postings. Ritz wants @Home to identify and "close" the back doors.

In a statement posted to Usenet on Wednesday, @Home's network policy manager David Jackson promised the company is taking aggressive action to "decrease the amount of extraneous news traffic originating from home.com."

Ritz says after speaking with @Home representatives he is confident they are "sincere" in their efforts. He said he will recommend @Home be given additional time to deal with the spamming problem before facing a UDP.

Although he would not specify exactly how long the extension would be, Ritz said @Home should have the loopholes fixed in "under a month."

"It is my hope that a UDP will not happen," said Ritz. "No one wants a UDP to happen but I felt my options were exhausted."

Ritz added that he had tried contacting @Home about the problem for 16 months before he issued the call for the UDP.

In the past, just the threat of a UDP has been enough to spur ISP's to action. Both Bell Atlantic and PsiNet were able to avoid UDP's by cutting down on spam. Others, like Compuserve and UUNet, did not comply and were blocked from the newsgroups.

Aside from being an annoyance, large amounts of spam can effectively clog up the newsgroups, making them nearly impossible to be used for their intended purpose of discussion and sharing information.

Although UDP's are supposed to be a last resort, some groups feel they are not an appropriate measure at all. Pathlink Technologies, which keeps track of Usenet spam and distributes free filtering software called UltraHippo, says it will not support the call for the UDP.

"You're going to punish legitimate posters," said Pathlink president Cindy Esco. "The percentage of people responsible for spam, compared to the number of Usenet participants it will punish, means it's not the best way to go about solving the problem."

Esco believes the best way to deal with spam is through extensive use of filtering tools.

However, just because Pathlink won't support the UDP, Esco thinks it will likely still be effective should it be enacted. In fact, both Ritz and

Esco acknowledge the publicity generated by the call for the UDP has already begun to have an impact just by calling attention the problem.

"Certainly nobody wants to be associated with a UDP," said Esco. "They've made their point."

Excite@Home confirms it is in ongoing talks with Usenet to resolve the spamming issue. Company spokesperson Marci Gottlieb said Excite@Home is "very hopeful" the UDP can be averted.

Secret Processor To Be Unveiled

A top-secret computer chip designed and funded by a powerful group of high-tech leaders is slated to roll out this Wednesday amid a flurry of high expectations - and intrigue.

For the past five years, Transmeta Corp. has secretly toiled away on the project under the leadership of CEO David Ditzel, a former chip designer for AT&T's Bell Labs and Sun Microsystems Inc.

What makes Transmeta all the more interesting is the cast of characters attached to the Santa Clara-based company. Employees include superstar designers like Linux creator Linus Torvalds, while investors consist of industry barons like Microsoft Corp. co-founder Paul Allen and billionaire financier George Soros.

"This is going to really raise eyebrows, and yes, the big chip makers - Intel and AMD - should be worried," said Drew Peck, a microprocessor analyst from Cowen & Co. "It doesn't hurt that it's coming from some of the most extraordinarily talented people in the semiconductor business."

The company has refused to reveal exactly what it is developing, cloaking its actions in a veil of mystery - thus adding to the hype. But Transmeta says it's finally ready to spill the beans.

Reporters and analysts have been told to plan to spend the better part of Wednesday with Transmeta at a 175-acre historic estate and villa in the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

There, according to marketing officials, "the world's first family of software-based smart microprocessors" will be unveiled and demonstrated.

The coy approach continues on Transmeta's Web site.

"We rethought the microprocessor to create a whole new world of mobility. Arriving January 19th, 2000. The Crusoe Processor."

The words fade into a bucolic picture of illusory footprints meandering across a white sandy beach.

Buried in the Web site's source code, an additional message discloses that "Crusoe will be cool hardware and software for mobile applications."

"Obviously their ploy here is to generate a lot of buzz in advance, and evidently they've succeeded in that regard," said Peck.

So what's behind the buzz?

Transmeta officials have given hints that Crusoe is a new type of semiconductor, or computer chip. The company designs them, but will not manufacture them.

Crusoe's combination of hardware and software could create a viable challenge to industry leader Intel Corp. But until Transmeta's product and strategy are unveiled, analysts remain cautious in their outlook.

"It's certainly a promising team," Gartner Group analyst Martin Reynolds said. "Running up against Intel is not a good thing to do, but if you look at processors that do lots of multimedia stuff, maybe there is a place for something truly innovative there. For example, look at where set top boxes are going. There are different requirements for processors for those things."

Joe Byrne, a chip analyst for Dataquest, was equally wary.

"There's a lot of competition in this market, so you have to be guarded in terms of your outlook," said Byrne. "However, this is a very interesting cast of characters and it will be interesting to see what they've produced."

Compaq To Test New Waters With iPaq

Compaq Computer is on the verge of shipping its long-awaited iPaq, a simplified PC that it hopes will return the company to glory in the corporate market.

The iPaq is a watershed product for the Houston-based PC maker and one that, in some ways, Compaq is betting its future on. Compaq has set a number of goals for the iPaq, including simplified design, direct delivery to customer and Internet-centric features. It plans to begin shipping the iPaq Jan. 24.

The iPaq comes in two versions: USB port only and USB with "legacy" connectors. While some of the legacy-lite models will come with Windows 9x operating systems, legacy-free models will be available only with Windows 2000. Interestingly, Windows 2000 won't begin shipping from Microsoft until sometime in February, although many Microsoft customers have already been sent final versions of the OS.

Compaq relied on standard, off-the-shelf components in designing the iPaq, a bold departure from its past tendency of introducing some proprietary components. This change helped shorten development time and cut costs.

"The tallest barrier we have getting things to our customers is not the price. We typically have an 18-month development cycle for products, but iPaq came together in about 100 days," said Michael Takemura, product marketing manager of Compaq's Internet products and services group.

The entry-level iPaq--with 500-MHz Celeron processor, 64-MB of RAM and 4.3-GB hard drive--starts at \$499.

The company also hopes to transform the way it and its customers think about buying and using PCs, Takemura said.

The iPaq represents a unified design approach that will become more deliberate and pronounced over time, particularly in products used both in the office and at home, Takemura said. "We see a collision course between work and home happening today, with more corporations supporting telecommuters and home workers."

This unified design approach first appeared in Compaq Armada notebooks last summer. With the new Armada line, Compaq introduced floppy, CD-ROM and DVD-ROM drives and other components able to be swapped between different models regardless of design. Customers will be able to use the same Armada drives and removable storage devices on the iPaq.

Customers will have to adjust to new pricing from Compaq. Eight basic iPaq models will be available, but for a fairly inflexible price compared to the volume discounts customers might be used to. The move reflects Compaq's determination to build and deliver iPaq direct at an aggressive price and to simplify the procurement process.

"It's like going in and buying a Saturn," Takemura said. "It's a single price. You don't have to haggle over it."

Compaq will look to build simpler PCs and other devices that are easier for IT managers to manage and maintain and easier for workers to use and connect to the Internet.

The first step, Takemura said, is a set of management tools from Lindon, Utah-based Altiris that Compaq plans to release at the same time as the iPaq. The management tools will first appear on the iPaq.

Microsoft to Ship 'Strong Encryption' Software

Microsoft Corp. said Tuesday it would release its Windows 2000 operating system worldwide using "strong encryption," in the first major product to be exported with the security feature since the government eased export controls on heavily coded software.

The industry lobbied hard for the government to ease restrictions on 128-bit code, which is much harder to crack than existing 64-bit. It is used to send secure electronic mail and protect data on networks from hackers.

The Clinton administration had opposed the use of such strong coding, arguing that criminals or terrorists could use it to cover illegal acts. But the industry won its case that the restrictions hampered U.S. competitiveness.

Microsoft made its announcement at the start of an industry computer security conference in San Jose, Calif. at which a number of companies are expected to unveil plans for strong-encryption export products.

Microsoft said the Windows 2000 operating system, set for commercial release next month, would mark the first platform with 128-bit encryption to be shipped internationally under the federal regulations on encryption exports announced last Friday. Microsoft said it worked closely with U.S. government regulators to obtain the necessary approvals to ship Windows 2000 with strong encryption to worldwide customers.

In the past, developers from other countries have added strong encryption, and some companies were given special permission to use the feature. But for new software, it will be built in and available to almost any commercial customer. The software has long been sold in the United States with 128-bit security.

"Windows 2000 will be the most secure operating system Microsoft has ever shipped, and we are excited to be able to further extend this security for our international customers via 128-bit encryption," said Brian Valentine, senior vice-president of the Windows Division at Microsoft.

Windows 2000, said to the most ambitious product launch ever for Microsoft, will be available commercially Feb. 17.

Millions Sign Up for Free Internet

Jennifer Hudson uses AltaVista's free Internet service for her Dallas home, but tapes paper across her computer screen to block out the annoying ads.

Eric Martineau and his Boston co-workers use NetZero's free Web service - along with a software program created by a hacker that zaps the ads off the screen.

Internet service providers that offer free access in return for bombarding users with advertising are rapidly signing up subscribers, turning heads at mainstream companies that charge \$20 or more a month. But how many people are actually looking at all the ads is unclear, fueling doubts about whether the free services will ever make a profit.

Analysts say about half the subscribers of these free services may not have used them in the last month. In interviews, some users expressed aggravation with the ads, and several said they went out their way to try to avoid them.

"It was always there. It took up the screen," Martineau said of NetZero's service, recalling with pleasure how he and 15 co-workers ran hacker software to wipe out the ads.

Despite the rough spots, analysts say the free services could force fee-based Internet providers to lower their rates and mull new ways to make money.

The number of active users of free Web services is expected to more than quintuple from 1.6 million U.S. households today to 8.8 million by the end of 2003, according to the Jupiter Communications research firm. That's a far faster rate of growth than the overall increase in Internet use, from 45 million Americans today to 68 million in 2003.

NetZero's latest figures, showing it has 3 million subscribers, would make it the nation's second-largest Internet access provider after America Online, an astonishing rise for a company just launched in 1998 - even if you discount half the users as inactive.

Driving the growth are Internet users who have come to expect a wealth of services and goods over the Web at free or discounted prices. At least some of them don't mind minor annoyances to get freebies.

Brenda Forsythe, a public relations executive based in Austin, Texas, has used NetZero since last summer and says it's definitely worth the "distracting" ads. She's pleased that it doesn't disconnect her from the Web too much, unlike other services. "It's been very dependable," she said.

Such positive feedback is a wake-up call to traditional for-fee services.

"It is a threat," said Emily Meehan, an analyst with the Yankee Group research firm. She said that companies that sell Internet access will have to work harder to sell services that consumers perceive as worth paying for.

America Online Inc., for instance, agreed last week to buy Time Warner Inc. in large part because its cable-TV lines will enable AOL to sell high-speed Internet access to customers.

That said, the free-service route is a rough business - unless the provider is able to grow into a dominant Internet force, gaining many millions of users with which to lure paying advertisers.

The new market is highly fragmented, with NetZero claiming the largest number of subscribers, followed by AltaVista's service, at 1.5 million. Freewwweb, owned by Smart World Technologies, tallies 250,000 users, and WorldSpy claims 100,000. There are others - and none are making money.

"I expect there won't be a large number of these companies" in a few years, said Joe Laszlo, an analyst with Jupiter Communications.

One hurdle for free ISPs is signing up newcomers to the Internet. Startups can't afford mass-mailings of software disks like America Online, so instead rely on surfers to find their way to Web sites to download services.

Many users, therefore, already pay for an Internet hookup, and may only use the free one as a back-up - or not at all.

The free Internet providers are working to get around these criticisms. NetZero tries to get folks to pay more attention to its ad banner by offering an array of services, including free e-mail. Indeed, it signed an advertising deal last week with General Motors that could be worth more than \$100 million and give GM exclusive access to information about NetZero customers.

Other free providers are eschewing ads altogether. WorldSpy jumps users to a start page that doubles as a shopping destination, to tempt people to buy products on other Web sites ranging from books to electronics. WorldSpy gets a cut of the purchase price.

"We don't have any of the floating ad bars," said WorldSpy chief executive Sharon Rothstein. "If you look at what consumers are saying, that's a highly intrusive element."

Consumer Sites Adopt Barter Model

A new crop of start-ups and their heavyweight financial backers are betting

that the next wave in consumer e-commerce will have people trading their belongings without cash.

Coinciding with a rash of business-to-business barter start-ups, the consumer-oriented swap sites aim to let users unload goods they no longer want in exchange for things they do want. The sites--which include Swap.com, Webswap.com, Intellibarter.com, MrSwap.com, and Swaprat.com -- typically plan to charge transaction fees, though most are waiving them while building their user bases.

Perhaps most striking about this quintet of nascent sites is the degree to which they've already differentiated themselves.

Swap.com has narrowed its market to kids under 18 years of age. Swaprat, initially offering only CDs, will add more categories but only for items with which they can offer users licensed catalogs, such as books and videos.

MrSwap.com--launching first with music, movies and games--resembles the business-to-business barter firms by providing an intermediate virtual currency so that users don't have to negotiate item-for-item trades. Unlike most of its competition, it will charge only for shipping and handling, making most of its money through advertising and mailed promotions.

Intellibarter will distinguish itself by creating a section for bartering expertise on collectors' items.

Backing up the new wave of cashless trading sites is a ton of venture funding.

WebSwap was first out of the gate in November with \$13 million in a first round from Sequoia Capital and Accel Partners. WebSwap plans to launch this quarter.

Swap.com is launching under the auspices of Bill Gross's Idealabs, a start-up incubator that claims eToys, GoTo.com, NetZero, and Ticketmaster Online-CitySearch among its successful ventures. Swap.com has the investments of "a handful of pretty big name VCs," according to Barb Wade, vice president of creative and production for the start-up, but she would not name them.

Swaprat is also keeping mum about its funding. Chief executive Michael Lin said the firm is waiting to settle with "a major Silicon Valley VC firm" that he would not name.

MrSwap.com said it was in the process of closing a \$12 million round with two "A-list, top-tier VC firms."

By and large, the sites are carving out roles as middlemen, most charging nominal fees for exchanging goods without having to carry any inventory.

The market--the start-ups and their investors believe--is vast and untapped.

"The idea was to capitalize on what companies like Amazon and eBay and Priceline did, reinventing the way buyers and sellers came together," Swaprat's Lin said. "We thought we could use the Internet to revolutionize traditional swapping by adding liquidity and letting people go across the entire Internet."

Lin envisions expanding the swap site to encompass community features.

"It's more than just the simple transaction itself," Lin said. "It's in the nature of the swap transaction that you're both a buyer and seller at the same time. And entertainment goods are good predictors of common interests. So it becomes a great model for community. As we collect information about what people are swapping, can group people together."

Teen- and child-oriented Swap.com thinks it has found the ideal market, one with little money to spend and lots of junk to trade.

"Kids are still growing so they move through merchandise pretty rapidly, and wind up with bedrooms and closets full of junk they don't use anymore," Wade said. "And don't have any pocket money. With Swap.com the kids get their opportunity to take their stuff and use it as currency."

Intellibarter, for its part, grabbed headlines following Christmas with an ad campaign focused on getting users to trade unwanted holiday presents.

Swap.com, which will launch officially Feb. 14 with a national advertising blitz, has seen heavy pre-launch traffic following some Los Angeles-area publicity.

In addition to investors' and users' enthusiasm, Swap.com has attracted the interest of major movie studios, Wade said, including three she would not name that have approached Swap.com about becoming sponsors in exchange for promoting their products.

Oregon Town Becomes a Dot-com City

It had to happen sometime.

Choosing Internet dollars over tradition, this tiny eastern Oregon town on Wednesday became the first municipality to actually name itself for the ubiquitous "dot-com" suffix of the Internet by temporarily changing its nearly two century-old name to Half.Com.

In the process, it wrung from a Pennsylvania company of the same name \$75,000 and 22 computers for the town's elementary school. The startup company, which bills itself as a one-on-one Internet auction site, hopes the one-year stunt will generate publicity worth much more.

The new name won't show up on any map, but the company wants to post a sign on the main road into town that would read: "Welcome to the first dot-com city in America, Half.com - aka Halfway, Oregon."

"It's been amazing," said company marketing director Mark Hughes, who has spent much of the past month shepherding the deal. "We've had calls from media around the world - Holland, Japan. We couldn't have imagined anything like this."

City Councilor Merrilyn Seal said the deal, approved by unanimous vote of the council on Wednesday, is a good opportunity for both sides. "I feel we have made two halves whole," she said.

Half.com also promised to help build a Web site for the city, and it

offered Internet sites to businesses in the community, as well. Many business people in town, who sell everything from fish bait to elephant garlic, already say they plan to take advantage the offer.

The deal could turn out to be one of the cleverest marketing schemes in recent memory, and a modest money-maker for the town of just over 360 people that has been ravaged by the decline of mining, logging and ranching in recent years.

"It's a gas," said Babete Beatty, who owns a bakery, restaurant and hotel in town. "I don't think it's going to do any harm."

But some people are worried that half.com - the company - is getting a bit too much bang for its buck.

"The City Council is giving this town away," said Mrs. Beatty's husband, Dale Beatty. "They've got a million dollars' worth of (free) advertising already."

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